



Department  
for Education

# **Advice for effective buying for your school**

**For school leaders, school business  
managers, back office staff and  
governing bodies in maintained schools**

**June 2013**

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## Introduction

This is advice from the Department for Education. This advice is non-statutory, and has been produced to provide guidance to schools about buying practices and how to achieve better value for money. It also helps recipients understand their obligations in relation to the basic rules of procurement when spending public money.

## Expiry or review date

This advice will next be reviewed when new public sector procurement regulations come into effect.

## Who is this advice for?

This advice is for:

- School leaders, school business managers, bursars, back office staff and governing bodies in all maintained schools.

## Key points

Basic rules of procurement aim to ensure that public funds are spent openly and fairly, and make the most of every budget, while protecting you against legal challenges, financial penalties and damage to your school's reputation. This document highlights:

- areas of spend where your school can achieve value for money
- organisations that provide contracts, deals and frameworks
- links to finance, procurement, and school related information
- provides ways to help you compare spend against other schools
- training opportunities
- information about buying green and environmental initiatives.

## Making savings

All schools are subject to public standards of accountability. Although schools spend most of their money on education staff, they collectively spend approximately £9.2 billion on other areas including energy, catering and back office. The benefits of effective procurement practices include:

- financial savings that can then be re-invested in your priorities for driving up standards
- goods or services purchased are fit for purpose

- suppliers deliver (and continue to deliver) as agreed
- legal and financial obligations are complied with.

If you've used a price comparison website to buy insurance, you'll know that prices can vary dramatically. Shopping around can help you to save a lot of money. So, are you shopping around for your school as well? After all, with budgets being tight, what you buy, and how much you pay for it, matters more now than ever. Comparing - or benchmarking - prices will help you to make the most of every penny of your school's budget. Take a look at our [benchmarking](#) pages for ideas.

Wherever you decide to buy goods and services from, the prices quoted will vary. The table below provides a snap shot of the different prices you could pay. It can be worth getting to know the market, and shopping around for good-value deals, rather than simply going to the first supplier you find.

Product	Supplier 1	Supplier 2	Supplier 3	Supplier 4
Value IT Keyboard, Qty 1	£3.95	£10.99	£4.01	£9.04
Toilet Roll – Pack 40	£8.95	£17.00	£14.20	£49.95
Own Brand 40g Glue Stick, 12 pck	£12.50	£4.68	£8.25	£1.95
Paper Value A4, 1 box 5 reams	£14.85	£11.55	£9.49	£9.75

Data obtained from a range of publicly available sources.

## Understanding your spend

Your school is responsible for its own financial management and the details of your deals and contracts. Understanding your finances and deals can help you identify where savings can be made and makes it easier to compare your current deals with those offered by organisations such as the Pro5 and the Government Procurement Service. Our [Schools financial management](#) web pages have information to help with your financial management and planning. Our [Schools Financial Benchmarking](#) website enables all English maintained schools to prepare charts so that they can compare their income and expenditure profiles with those of similar schools.

## Working with your local authority (LA)

Each LA sets out procurement regulations that must be followed by every public service body it funds, including all maintained schools. You must follow your LA's most up-to-date regulations for procurement spend, including the steps you'll need to take for any spending up to specific thresholds set by your LA.

Your LA can also help and support you in getting to grips with procurement, advising you on challenging projects and contracts and helping you to find best-value deals. Most LAs will have contracts or frameworks for buying a wide range of the most popular goods and services it needs. Your school can also buy through these LA contracts and frameworks, using them to find a range of good-value suppliers and make purchases quickly and easily.

Buying through the contracts and frameworks already set up by your LA can have significant benefits for your school. Prices will be competitive; the suppliers will have been checked to ensure they're reputable and credit-worthy. In short, most of the hard work of procurement and compliance has already been done for you by your LA, reducing your workload and ensuring you're always getting best value from spending public money. It's also worth benchmarking the prices you source for different traded services to ensure you're getting the best possible deal.

## Areas for potential savings

There are recognised deals that you can use to buy certain goods and services including:

- **Energy** – we are working with partners to make sure schools can access energy at fair prices. Visit the [energy pages](#) on the DfE website for updates
- **Food ingredients, catering supplies and catering equipment** – visit the [Department's food page](#) or the [Childrens Food Trust | Home](#) for more information. Your local authority may also be able to help
- **Administrative supplies** – ask your local authority what deals they have in place, and visit the DfE's [administrative supplies web page](#) for links to other organisations that you can buy from
- **Supply teacher insurance** – buy through your local authority if they have a contract in place. Visit the [DfE website](#) for more information
- **Grounds maintenance improvement** – check with your local authority in the first instance or you can use a public sector buying organisation. Visit the [DfE website](#) for more information
- **Building maintenance and improvement** – ask your local authority what arrangements they have in place. Alternatively contact the [Government Procurement Service](#) or [EduBuy](#) to see what's available
- **Cleaning and caretaking** – ask your local authority what arrangements they have in place
- **Telephony** – paying too much for calls? Visit the [Government Procurement Service](#) for frameworks or use one of the [Pro5](#) who have deals in place

- **Exam fees** – working with other schools can bring savings. The Association of Colleges has a useful [exam fee download](#) which can provide ideas
- **Shared services** – see the [shared services pages](#) on the jisc website for ideas where collaborative procurement particularly within ICT is creating major savings.

## ICT provision

The Department for Education has a number of [ICT Frameworks](#) in place that have:

- suppliers with knowledge and experience of delivering educational solutions
- suppliers who have been evaluated via an EU compliant competition process
- quality assured suppliers that have been subjected to technical / quality evaluation and testing process
- suppliers who have signed up to a comprehensive set of pre-determined contractual terms and conditions (limiting risk exposure to customers)
- suppliers that are subject to contract and performance management and reporting
- access to specialist advice as well as tender templates and model contracts.

[ICT Services](#) – is a department framework that is free to use, which enables the purchase of most categories of ICT infrastructure used by schools. This is being used extensively within the Academies community with nearly £150 million already committed through it and has become the default procurement mechanism for the Free Schools ICT capital programme. ***A specific ‘Lite’ version of this Framework’s terms and conditions is available for single school use.***

[Information Management and Learning Services \(IMLS\)](#) – is a Government Procurement Service (GPS) framework placed on behalf of the Department and specifically covers educational management information systems and learning platforms.

[Microsoft licensing Memorandum of Understanding](#) - In January 2013, the Department signed a brand new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Microsoft for the benefit of all UK schools. This was delivered following extensive negotiations led by Government Procurement Service (GPS) in collaboration with the Department’s commercial team. The new MoU enables all those schools, choosing to purchase Microsoft software, to have more flexibility and choice, access significant pricing discounts and savings, together with enhanced licensing terms.

**Advice and guidance on the use of these Frameworks can be found on the DfE website but if additional help is required, please contact the procurement team's group email address [schools.ictsupport@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:schools.ictsupport@education.gsi.gov.uk)**

## **Broadband and internet access**

A reliable and secure broadband service is essential to teaching, learning and management within schools particularly as schools take full advantage of new cloud and web-based services. Schools use broadband intensively, regularly dealing with large quantities of data and media-rich applications and services. Generally, schools require higher levels of security and network performance than most homes and many businesses.

Guidance on esecurity is available from [The National Education Network](#) (NEN)

Schools should carefully consider any broadband services and connectivity offered by their local authority or their Regional Broadband Consortia (RBC). These services are highly tailored to address the needs of schools and are delivered using the private NEN backbone infrastructure service provided by Janet UK.

Schools will benefit from being presented with a clear and transparent menu of services and pricing, that allows them to buy what they need, whilst giving them the freedom to pay for additional services or support if they choose.

If your school does decide to go to market, we advise that you take into account ISP standards including things like content filtering, other measures to ensure eafety, protection against virus attack, and type of connectivity. We advise that you read the small print from any suppliers' terms and conditions and compare like for like.

More information about what to look for and ask about when buying broadband is available in the [associated procurement resources for schools](#)

The [Government Procurement Service](#) has broadband framework contracts in place that schools can use but you need to ensure these suppliers are familiar with any specific areas mentioned above.

## **Photocopiers (multifunctional devices)**

It can be easy to be tempted into uneconomical deals on leasing photocopiers, or multifunctional devices, by suppliers who offer 'gestures of goodwill' or sales incentives.

There is a joint collaborative photocopier and print services framework between [The Government Procurement Service](#), [YPO](#) and [ESPO](#) that all schools can use without the need for further competition.

An on-line portal has recently been launched so users can now buy RM1599 Lot 1 products start to finish on-line. Many schools were part of the user testing and provided valuable insight. The feedback has been very positive for users so far. Once registered users can see the pricing, compare products and calculate savings.

Please see the [customer guidance](#) for further information. This is what two schools had to say about their new deals:

**By using the new RM1599 framework Benthall Primary School, Stoke Newington, London saved 90% on previous charges using the new Xerox MFD agreement plus over 80% on the Service contract.**

**"We've accessed the new RM1599 Lot 1 framework and we're saving over £1,500 a year. The greatest savings have been on the new colour capable device, 34% less for lease rental contract and 51% lower for the service contract. We're glad to say the service has been excellent and we can now fund other vital resources." Meadowgate School**

KCS can also supply a wide range of mono and colour-capable devices, from desktop up to high quality colour MFD's. For more information contact the KCS Photocopier/MFD department at [kcsphoto@kent.gov.uk](mailto:kcsphoto@kent.gov.uk)

## Photocopier considerations

We are aware of examples of schools entering into really poor deals that have had a serious and long term impact on schools' finances. If you are looking to enter into any kind of agreement relating to the lease of a photocopier or a multifunctional device, make sure that you are getting an excellent deal by considering the following points:

- be aware that some agreements will require you to give notice of termination even though an expiry date has been specified. Also check for financial implications of terminating early
- an operating lease means entering into an agreement to rent equipment. A finance lease is equivalent to committing the school to a loan, which is prohibited under current legislation. [See tips for successful leasing](#)
- ensure you include and compare the Government Procurement Service, Pro5 or local authority approved suppliers in your quotation exercise
- ensure that any verbal and written quotations are exactly what you have agreed to. Do not allow contracts to be completed by the supplier afterwards



- your quarterly payment for one photocopier should be hundreds not thousands
- any offers of cash back or marketing support is an indication that you are entering into a finance lease
- at the end of the agreement term ownership of the equipment should remain with the supplier
- please see the MFDs (photocopiers) page on the DfE website for more information.

## Temporary education staff

The Managed Services for Temporary Agency Resources (MSTAR) framework contract offers schools the chance to source a range of temporary education staff.

The benefits of the framework include:

- improved quality of supply, especially in regard to safeguarding children
- reduced costs of supply by regularising and reducing the fees charged by agencies
- reduced administrative effort incurred in procuring temporary workers
- reduced demand for temporary workers by providing management information to aid, for example, workforce planning.

For more information [Pro5 MSTAR website](#)

## Public Sector Buying Organisations (PSBOs)

Who are they?

[Pro 5 -](#) Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation, Central Buying Consortium, YPO and the North Eastern Purchasing Organisation.

[Government Procurement Service](#) - delivering procurement savings for the whole of the public sector.

What do they do?

Pro5 help and support schools to achieve better value for money through combined buying power and procurement expertise for commonly bought goods and services.

Provide framework contracts that have been procured professionally and are dedicated to the delivery of education. Email [enquiries@pro5.org](mailto:enquiries@pro5.org).

## [EduBuy - Linking education to better buying](#)

Several public bodies united to enable schools and Academies to achieve up to £1billion savings and achieve efficiencies with their everyday purchasing requirements. YPO has worked with fellow public sector organisations ESPO, Government Procurement Service (GPS) and the Department for Education (DfE) to provide a single online platform for academies and schools to access EU compliant contracts.

EduBuy links schools to good deals and simplifies the buying process. It is a free website dedicated to providing wider choice and value for the education sector [www.edubuy.org](http://www.edubuy.org) offers a collective portfolio of over 300 of YPO, ESPO and GPS's EU compliant contracts across core areas, including ICT, stationery, facilities management and energy. It contains practical procurement guidance and case studies to help schools, academies and the wider education identify savings and efficiency opportunities

## GPS

The role of the Government Procurement Service is to maximise the value for money obtained by Government departments and other public bodies through the procurement and supply of goods and services. The established procurement arrangements allow public sector organisations to save time and money. These cover a range of areas such as ICT, energy, travel, fleet, office solutions, property solutions and professional services. The GPS News pages contain monthly procurement updates.

## Crescent Purchasing Consortium

Who are they?

The [Crescent Purchasing Consortium](#) is the largest purchasing consortium for the English academies and free schools sectors, and the only national purchasing group for UK Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges

What they do?

- Offer access to properly procured contracts across commonly purchased categories of goods and services in the education sector and professional purchasing advice guidance and tools.

Membership of CPC is free of charge and open to all schools with a sixth form and academies. Visit the [CPC website](#) to join for free and access to available frameworks

## Develop and improve your procurement knowledge

Having a basic knowledge of public procurement is a useful tool in creating efficiencies and cost savings in school.

## [BuyWays](#)

- BuyWays has been developed by the Department for Education as a basic introduction to procurement. It can be used by anyone working in education in England - bursars and business managers, administrators, governors, teachers and headteachers.
- The guidance and advice in the BuyWays modules can be used as an introduction, and basic up-skilling course, for anyone new to public procurement, or as a handy 'refresher' for more experienced buyers.
- There are six modules in the course, dealing with topics like the Procurement Cycle, EU Legislation, and Contract Management. There are case studies to help you learn about real-life procurement, and short review sections where you can test your knowledge.
- All users can access [BuyWays](#) free of charge.

Other organisations offering training:

- [National College for Teaching and Leadership](#) offers training for school business managers.
- [National Association of School Business Management](#) also has a range of training courses available.
- [Association of School and College Leaders](#) holds regional events for school business managers.
- [National Governors' Association](#) provides a range of training for governors.

## Buying green

Does your curriculum cultivate the knowledge, skills, values and confidence for pupils to minimise waste and consume sustainably. Do you have links with external bodies that can champion the cause to being green? For example:

- [Green Buying](#) provides information about what other businesses are doing to become more sustainable and the tools to act now, plus there's the Eco Shop which sells green office supplies at competitive prices.
- [Walk to School](#) encourages all children to make walking their journey part of their daily routine.
- [Big Green Book](#) provides information on new services and updates in the environmental and utilities field.
- [Safe PC Disposal](#) and [Green IT Disposal](#) offer free recycling of redundant IT equipment and a guaranteed secure data destruction facility.

## Be sustainable

The Government has pledged to make this the ‘greenest government ever’, with far-reaching plans to protect the natural environment, tackle climate change, reduce carbon emissions and promote sustainability – procurement plays a key part in that. We believe schools understand their responsibility on how sustainable development should be reflected in their ethos and day-to-day operations. Our [Top 20 tips for Sustainability in Schools](#) has more.

The Government is committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions of at least 80 per cent by 2050 – relative to 1990 levels. Further advice can be found on our [My2050 teachers toolkit](#) .

There are good practice materials on the [Sustainability and Environmental Education website](#) that underpin the national framework for sustainable schools, which includes a series of top tips on how to help schools become more sustainable, including a [Top Tips to reduce energy and water use in schools](#).

The Government also supported the launch in 2011 of the Sustainable Schools Alliance, which aims to provide a clear and compelling offer of support to all schools, which will help them to put sustainability at the heart of what they do. The Alliance, which brings together over 400 local and voluntary organisations, aims to provide accessible information for schools to continue their sustainability journeys. Visit the [Sustainable Schools Alliance](#) website.

## Useful links

[GOV.UK](#)- The official UK government website.

[Carbon Trust](#) – The Carbon Trust’s website provides energy saving ideas.

[Buying goods and services](#) - this includes available contracts and frameworks for a range of goods and services.

[Procurement guidance - Schools](#) - in this section you can download the ‘Procurement essentials’ document which helps with all procurement issues and outlines how procurement can help to deliver your school’s outcomes. You can also download the [procurement decision tree](#) which takes you through the basic questions and choices you’ll need to consider when you purchase any goods, works or services for your school.

[Schools financial management](#) - this section contains guidance for schools on effective financial management, including an introduction to consistent financial reporting and advice on how to use benchmarking data to achieve best results.

[Leadership and governance](#) - this section contains information on all aspects of school leadership and governance, including issues such as strategic funding, school performance, governance and managing staff, and the management of teaching and learning.

[Schools](#) - provides a range of information about schools.

## Associated resources

Here are examples of private supplier initiatives where contracts between you and the supplier are required. We do not endorse such resources but understand that they can provide alternative information that may prove useful:

- [TES HireWire](#) , [Eteach](#) and [GuardianSchoolsJobs](#) for on line recruitment services for educational establishments.
- [Teacher Network \(The Guardian\)](#) – provides thousands of ready made resources for teachers on subjects including maths through to PE aimed at four to 18 year olds.
- Professional educational support services including [The Key](#), [tengovernor](#) and [Innovate My School](#)
- Trade Associations such as [British Educational Suppliers Association \(BESA\)](#) and [Professional Publishers Association](#) who may provide information on suppliers to educational establishments.
- E-marketplaces to assist with price comparison, e.g. [Buy4My](#)

## Tell us what you think

We would like your feedback on:

- Any gaps in information and support
- Content of this resource
- Additional information you require
- Content of the DfE website
- Anything else you would find useful

Email us at [CG.COMMUNICATIONS@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:CG.COMMUNICATIONS@education.gsi.gov.uk)



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